

## Testimony Supporting

### SB 5, AAC Online Dating Operators, Online Child Grooming and Harassment, Domestic Violence Training and Protections for Victims of Family Violence and Domestic Violence

**Judiciary Committee  
March 21, 2022**

#### Member Organizations

**The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services**  
Ansonia, CT

**The Center for Family Justice**  
Bridgeport, CT

**The Center for Empowerment and Education**  
Danbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program United Services**  
Dayville, CT

**Network Against Domestic Abuse**  
Enfield, CT

**Domestic Abuse Services Greenwich YWCA**  
Greenwich, CT

**Interval House**  
Hartford, CT

**Chrysalis Domestic Violence Services**  
Meriden, CT

**New Horizons**  
Middletown, CT

**Prudence Crandall Center**  
New Britain, CT

**The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services**  
New Haven, CT

**Safe Futures**  
New London, CT

**Domestic Violence Crisis Center**  
Norwalk, CT

**Women's Support Services**  
Sharon, CT

**Domestic Violence Crisis Center**  
Stamford, CT

**Susan B. Anthony Project**  
Torrington, CT

**Safe Haven**  
Waterbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program United Services**  
Willimantic, CT

Good afternoon Senators Winfield, Flexer and Kissel, Representatives Stafstrom, Blumenthal and Fishbein, and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, housing advocacy and resources, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

Senate Bill 5, specifically sections 8 - 10, 13 - 23, and 26 - 27, contain several of CCADV's priority issues this session.

**Sections 26 - 27 propose that the General Assembly allocate annual funding in the amount of \$1,440,000 to fund 18 domestic violence child & family advocates across the state at CCADV's member organizations.** We thank Senators Looney and Duff for prioritizing this funding request. Connecticut currently does not provide any state funding to support this critical role within the domestic violence service system.

As the pandemic has stretched on longer than any of us originally anticipated, the secondary effects of this global crisis continue to play out in communities and homes across Connecticut. Much attention has rightfully been paid to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and social-emotional development of children. This concern is only heightened for those children who, on top of dealing with pandemic isolation, have been experiencing domestic violence in their homes.

The pandemic has caused fewer children to interact with a variety of systems intended to offer safety and support. Kids weren't physically present in school for an entire year, severely limiting the ability of teachers and other helping professionals to notice any irregularities in behavior attributable to experiencing or witnessing abuse at home. The isolation caused by the pandemic may have itself been used to explain irregularities noticed via online platforms, perhaps inadvertently missing other dynamics present in the home. Many after-school and community-based activities, including those provided by CCADV's member organizations, were curtailed during the height of the pandemic making things even harder for children experiencing domestic violence at home because they had no other outlet or safe place to go during the day.

Domestic violence child & family advocates work for CCADV's 18 member organizations and provide essential supports to both children and the non-offending parent. They utilize a number of trauma-informed, evidence-based and resiliency-driven approaches to their work. Services they provide include counseling, coordinating basic needs, school and childcare enrollment, scheduling transportation, and advocating for the child and non-offending parent within the courts and child welfare system. Throughout the pandemic advocates have gone above and beyond for the children they serve, often stepping up to manage remote learning or assisting with childcare when parents need to go to a job interview and other care isn't available.

Currently, federal pass-through funds pay for only about a quarter of the cost of a full-

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time advocate at each domestic violence organization. This results in CCADV's 18 member organizations having to either raise funds privately to fully fund a position or have a staff member split their time across various functions, leaving less time for child-focused services. Looking at the number of cases these advocates handle each year makes the problem starkly clear: over a five-year period (2017 to 2021), there was an average of 4,313 children served annually. However, given that each member organization receives federal funding for a maximum of 26% of one staff member's time, it means that funding only supports 2.26 hours of service to each child, per year. We know that this isn't enough time for a child experiencing abuse in their home.

As we begin to come out of the pandemic, we are concerned that there will be a large influx of children presenting with significant need to various systems, including the domestic violence service system. We must be prepared to meet the needs of these most vulnerable victims. This includes reshaping our domestic violence child & family advocate program to address the multiple layers of need that we expect children to present with in the coming years. Adequate state funding is needed to properly support a full-time advocate at each of the state's 18 domestic violence organizations. For a small amount of annual funding (less than 0.01% of the overall state budget), we can make a big impact on kids.

**Sections 8 - 9 of the bill seek to require that all state employees view a one-hour virtual training developed by the CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO), in conjunction with CCADV, regarding domestic violence.** Such training would include information concerning domestic violence, abuser and victim behaviors, how domestic violence may impact the workplace and the resources available to victims. The bill also requires all employers with three or more employees to post information about domestic violence and the resources available to victims. This too would be developed by CHRO, in conjunction with CCADV, and made available on the Commission's website.

The emotional and physical impact of domestic violence on a victim is often significant and can impact every aspect of their daily life, including their ability to focus and be productive at work. An analysis of 2012 U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention data estimates that U.S. adults experience 741 million lost days of work because of victimizations by an average of 2.5 perpetrators per survivor. The violence can also impact other employees at the company. According to *Workplaces Respond to Domestic & Sexual Violence*, approximately 24% of workplace violence is related to personal relationships. This involves situations where an individual gains access to a workplace and commits a crime targeting an employee or customer who is a current or former intimate partner. Stalking, disruptive phone calls, and general threats can all take a toll on a victim's co-workers and impact company productivity.

Employers can and should play an important role in protecting their employees by creating a workplace culture of support and resilience. Work may be the only safe place for a survivor and a prime opportunity for help-seeking from supervisors or co-workers. It is critical for employers and employees to be knowledgeable about domestic violence and what help is available if an employee ever discloses abuse.

Domestic violence is a widespread and far-reaching issue that impacts millions of Americans. While it knows no gender, socioeconomic or religious boundaries, it disproportionately impacts women, in particular women of color. By increasing awareness about domestic violence and the free resources available across Connecticut at CCADV's 18 member organizations, the proposed one-hour virtual training will benefit the safety of state employees, both those experiencing abuse at home and those who may be exposed if the abuse enters the workplace. It will offer state agency leadership best practices for creating a workplace culture that fosters support and resilience and makes employees feel safe asking for help. And requiring most employers to post information about domestic violence resources will serve as a simple, cost-effective method for saving potentially millions of dollars in lost productivity.

**Sections 10 and 13 - 23 of the bill are a proposal spearheaded by CHRO that seeks to add family violence victims to various anti-discrimination statutes, providing protection in employment, housing, public accommodations, and credit transactions.**

Domestic violence can have far-reaching implications for its victims. These can appear in almost all facets of their lives, from employment, to housing, to a victim's credit status. This bill seeks to address some of the discrimination that can follow victims throughout their lives, just as the state has sought to do for several other reasons. And while domestic violence knows no gender, socioeconomic or religious boundaries, it is important to point out that it disproportionately impacts women, in particular women of color.

Under current Connecticut anti-discrimination laws, the only way to pursue a complaint regarding discrimination an individual faces due to their status as a victim of family violence is by pursuing their case as a gender or race discrimination case, as family violence victims are disproportionately women of color. By adding this protected class and providing protection in employment, housing, public accommodations, and credit transactions, state policy will begin to address some of the key areas in which victims are vulnerable.

We already mentioned above the significant toll that domestic violence can have on a victim's employment. This bill seeks to create several employment protections for victims, including workplace accommodations, some that clarify existing state law, such as Connecticut's safe leave law (CGS § 31-51ss). A 2018 national survey of survivors found that 83% of respondents reported that their abusive partners disrupted their ability to work, and of those individuals, 53% said they lost a job because of the abuse. Forty-nine percent (49%) said they missed one or more days of work, 18% missed out on a promotion or raise, and 38% said they lost out on other work opportunities.

One of the top predictors of whether a victim will leave an abusive relationship is the victim's ability to financially support her or himself and their children. Understanding the impact that domestic violence can have on a victim's ability to maintain employment is important for understanding why some choose to stay and what a significant role employers can play. Victims sometimes lose their jobs because of absences or related job performance issues, yet in order to address the abuse and keep themselves and their kids safe, victims may need time to attend court appearances, obtain legal or medical assistance, and find a new place to live, among other needs. Lack of supportive workplace policies may result in victims losing their job, making them even more financially dependent on their abuser and likely to remain in the relationship.

This bill will establish critical workplace protections for victims among other meaningful anti-discrimination protections. We urge the committee's support.

Thank you for your consideration.

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